

FreeThought

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED RATIONALIST MONTHLY

Special Number On Ghosts And Spirits

FEBRUARY 1978



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God is a myth, Immortality an illusion, Religion a gigantic fraud

Letters

To,

The Editor,
FREETHOUGHT.

Re : ' Ghosts' in IV Std. Tamil Text Book.

I am shocked to find in Lesson 10 of a IV standard Tamil Text Book mention of 'ghosts'. It is depicted as if 'ghosts' exist in a tree and it can get into any human being and influence him. In the penultimate paragraph it is mentioned that the 'ghost' died.

Such lessons will have the following effect:

1. The child in the impressionable age will think that 'ghosts' exist.
2. A fear of trees (instead of love for nature) will develop in the child's mind and she will think that 'ghosts' may exist in any tree.
3. Seed of superstition will be laid as the child will believe that 'ghosts' can enter the body of a human-being.

It is regrettable that Tamilnadu Government book should contain such a lesson. Such a lesson should be dropped from the examination syllabus so that the children are not made to read falsehood over and over again.

A. PHANEENDRA BABU.

FINANCE FOR 'FT'

I have just received an issue of "Free-thought". I greatly enjoyed reading it as it dispelled several mental doubts.

The magazine will always need financial help for its very existence unless some space is devoted to advertisements, and the magazine's existence and subscription rates are widely advertised in magazines and newspapers. The writeups (or "plugs") in newspapers and 'mags' will go a long way in

increasing the membership of the magazine. I am sure that the staff (:) and subscribers of "Freethought" will be in a position to influence newsmen.

A radio and T. V. interview should not be too difficult to organise. Certain foreign papers and magazines are always sympathetic. Their kindness should be judiciously utilised.

Perhaps, photographs in the magazine would help too,

ATUL MITAL,
New Delhi (10-11-1977)

(Most welcome suggestions. Will readers help us to implement? Except a part-time typist, there is no editorial or administrative staff—Ed.)

I have read some of the articles in FREE-THOUGHT of December, 1977 and found Ms. Margaret Bhatti's and Mr. Lakshmiratan Bharati's articles very enlightening.

I have read the letter of Mr. David Josephy, Orissa, entitled "Rationalist Novels" with due concern. I hope you would have read or got read his Malayalam novel. If found in conformity with his contentions as well as to be helpful in advancing Rationalist views, I feel it should be translated in English and published by I.R.A. I will feel happy to contribute my humble mite towards it on hearing from you.

Y A LOKHANDWALA,
Bo a bay.

Satish Ghosh

Sir,

Allow me to pay my respectful homage and glowing tribute to the memory of S. Ghosh the Founder-Secretary of our Association and to offer my sincere condolences to the concerned persons and members, though I had not the honour of his personal acquaintance. In any case, it is enough, he was my colleague, as a member of our honourable Association which aims at noble ideals, lofty norms and highest human values...

REGIS S VICTORIEN,
Pondicherry.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Belief in a Ghost directing the universe must be ditched along with belief in witchcraft, the sanctity of the snake-dance, and the rituals of voodooism.

Woolsey Teller
American Writer

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ARZICA PONNUSAMY, D.F.A., P.D.



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GHOSTS, SPIRITS AND SOULS

To an intellectual the very subject of ghosts may smack of childishness. Next, he may shrug off a pantheon of gods as one for mass consumption. He may sit up only if 'soul' is discussed.

Magic was attributed to the work of ghosts, spirits, satan, devil or what have you. What the egoist human being could not do himself, he was trying to achieve through magic, viz., ghosts and spirits.

The beginnings of religion are to be found in magic. Some of the primitive men shed their ego in favour of third 'parties' viz., gods. Thus came religion purporting to achieve what was not possible for humans to achieve (under a given set of circumstances, of course) and claiming to know things about which man is ignorant.

When the god concept met with a number of irrefutable contradictions, a few clever men escaped into the soul theory. The contradictions that this has led us to are only too obvious to rationalists.

If man reconciles himself to his true status in the Universe (without claiming for himself the knowledge(?) of the purpose of this Universe), not only ghosts but also religions and souls will disappear.

MAGIC, RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Thought about the nature of the external world begins with magic, develops into religion, next reaches the level of philosophical speculation, and finally attains to the scientific method.

Man may have existed for half a million years. The relics of his early life suggest that his mental activities included something of the nature of magic or religion.

It appears that magic usually precedes religion and magic itself, is curiously allied to science. The savage magician does not call on a god or spiritual power to intervene on his behalf, and he may or may not believe in the existence of such powers. His rites and practices are, in his opinion, bound to bring about the desired effect and any failure on his part is due merely to a wrong application of them. The chief "laws" on which magic is based are, of course, incorrect. The savage does not attempt to formulate them, but the ideas which underly his magical practices are probably the following:

1. The outcome of a set of circumstances may be influenced by the representation of an event similar to the one desired. Thus, dances representing the hunting and killing of an animal are believed to promote the success of a similar hunt, carried out either at the same time or on some future occasion.

2. Beings can communicate their qualities to each other by contact. A simple example is the fact that in Bohemia the first apple of a young tree is often plucked and eaten by a woman who has borne many children in the belief that her fertility will be communicated to the tree, which will then bear many apples.

3. Substances and persons can be influenced at a distance without any material communication in the sense of anything perceptible to the senses. An example of this is the common practice of sticking pins into a wax figure in order to bring about the illness of the person whom it is supposed to represent.

Magic is a mistaken association of ideas. The laws of magic are not based on any accurate observations, but rather on the wish of primitive people to carry out actions which are beyond their physical powers. The lesson that the truth about material things is unaffected by our human wishes, and, is independent of our sense of what is, fitting was not learned by science until the seventeenth century.

(Courtesy: A Short History of Science
by F. Sherwood Taylor, Ph. D.)

Spirited Discussions

Believer: 'I am sure that this is the work of the spirits.'

Chemist: 'Spirits? Of course, I believe in them, and I use them.'

Believer: 'You use them! What for and how?'

Chemist: 'Yes, see I use methylated spirit, rectified spirit etc. as solvents....'

Believer: 'No, no, you didn't take it in the right spirit. What I mean is those things that float in the ether.'

Chemist: 'Ether, yes, it boils at 34 degrees. That is why I lock it up in the refrigerator.'

Believer: 'There is no ghost of a chance my getting across this guy.'

Chemist: 'Did you say—no ghost—there I agree with you.'

D. Nettar.

Magic vs. Miracle

When anything regarded as out of the ordinary course of nature is brought about by human means it is called a miracle if the magician belongs to the beholder's own religion, but it is magic often black magic if the wizard belongs to another religion.

Dr. Margaret Murray

Magic Today

Magic, like witchcraft, still exists today not merely in the form of children's stories and fears, or grown up's enjoyment of creepy tales, belief in fortune telling, omens, amulets and our own half embarrassed fear of walking under ladders but as cults attracting many of those who ought to have more sense.

—Anonymous

Who are Witches?

Witches were simply poor silly creatures who either deluded themselves into believing that they had certain powers, or more frequently were tortured into admitting things that they did not do.

There is another theory that witches really did what they admitted to doing but that they did not possess supernatural powers. They were in fact believers in the old religion of pre-Christian times and the Church in Europe took centuries to root them out.

What is spiritualism?

It is a religion in which the division of man into body, soul and spirit is accepted. It is supposed that the soul is the sublimation of the body, needing food which after digestion by the body is refined into a more ethereal form. It even is supposed to take the actual form of the body which is supposedly

the covering by which soul communicates with the outer world before passing the messages on to the spirit which is a process of the 'Divine' in which it will ultimately be absorbed.

The passage from lower to higher spheres is accompanied by an increase in moral perfection. In the lower spheres, it is believed to retain something of the material which enables medicines to enter into contact with it. Therefore, nearly all spiritualist meetings include a seance and for the rest, there are prayers, sermons and hymns. There are Ministers, lay Officers and mediums.

Those who attend services are people who come seeking for proof that their loved ones are not dead but have "passed on". They are unlikely to retain a critical attitude on the subject however hard-headed they may be in other respects.

(Catholics are not permitted to hold spiritualist beliefs.)



TEST FOR REASON NO. 5

Can you explain the probable reason for these unexpected results?

Solution to Test No. 4

- A — Theist group.
- B — Theist group.
- C — Rationalist group.

Explanation: No man in the Island will admit that he is a theist because:

(a) If you ask a Rationalist (who always tells truth) he will say that he belongs to the Rationalists.

(b) If you ask a Theist (who always lies) he will say that he belongs to the Rationalists.

So when the professor asked 'A' he might have told 'Rationalist'. But 'B' said that 'A' was saying that 'A' belonged to Theists. So it is obvious that 'B' was lying and hence belonged to Theists. 'C' said that 'B' was lying. So 'C' belongs to Rationalists. 'A' said that 'C' was lying. So 'A' belongs to Theists.

The following have sent correct solutions for "Test for Reason No. 3."

1. Chander Raju, Kalpakkam.
2. P. V. Jaya Prakash, Bandra.
3. A. Jaya Sheela, Ujire.
4. K. K. Kishore, Zami Golve palli.
5. Mr. T. P. Kunhiraman, Ayancheri.
6. R. Lakshminarayanan, Bangalore;
7. K. Murali Krishna, Eluru.
8. G. L. N. Murthy, Visakhapatnam.
9. J. Ravindranath Singh, Madras.
10. Vasi Reddy Madhu, Kurnool.

Mr. R. Lakshminarayan, Bangalore gets the prize in the draw.

There is one Sivarama Iyer living very close to I.R.A's office at Madras. He is intensely god fearing. Every evening he must visit a temple. He is however a bit progressive in that he does not mind a Siva or Vishnu Temple. His method of visiting temples is as follows:

Daily in the evening he bathes and proceeds to the bus stop near his house. Two buses going to different destinations come there. They are route No. 23 going to Mylapore (where a 'famous' Siva Temple is situated) and No. 25 going to Triplican (where you will find a huge Vishnu Temple). The frequency for both the buses is 30 minutes. He takes whichever bus comes first and visits one temple or the other.

On 1st January 1978, as he had no better work to do, he wanted to find out from his diary the number of visits he made to each of the two temples during 1977. He was sure that they would be roughly equal.

But he was rather shocked to find that he visited Siva Temple only 25 days against 340 visits to Vishnu Temple. He was horrified that Siva would get wild! He lost all faith in the law of averages. He was sure that he was taking the first bus coming to that particular bus stop. He was not maintaining any particular time to reach the bus stop. Nor were the bus timings changed during the year.

HIGHWAY GHOSTS



DR. A. T. KOVOOR

A well-known and wealthy motorist, who was one of our pioneers in Sri Lanka and a great enthusiast, was the owner of a Delauny-Belleville many years ago. The motorist had gone to the races at Galle and was returning late one evening to the Hikkaduwa Rest House where he was staying. His car was full and he asked his chauffeur to sit on the luggage carrier. Thus the chauffeur was facing backwards and seated in the rear of the car. The motorist himself took over the driving.

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Suddenly opposite the Dadalla cemetery all the lights went out. He stopped his car, and the chauffeur got out and relit the great big carbide lamps. The party then proceeded and when they got to Hikkaduwa they waited for the chauffeur to come from the back and open the car doors (this was in days when old world courtesy was functioning). As the chauffeur did not come round, the motorist not very pleased, got out of his car and went to the back to find his chauffeur laid out on the luggage grid in a dead faint. The chauffeur was revived and came out with his story:

Figure in white

After the lamps had been re-lit at Dadalla and the car proceeded a figure in white kept on running behind the car. Each time the figure got close to the car it became bigger and bigger, and then two arms stretched out to seize him. When he shouted the figure retreated and became smaller and smaller. As his shouts did not reach the occupants of the car because he was seated at the rear and facing backwards, no help came to him and then the figure came on again and again.

Quite unable to bear the horror of it, the poor chauffeur became unconscious. The next thing he knew was being revived at the rest-house.

How many motorists have experienced this type of thing at Dadalla?

The story appeared in 1961 July issue of "THE RECORD", the monthly journal of the Automobile Association of Sri Lanka. The following story was also reported.

Gorakana Ghost

The Galle Road has another fatal spot. It is the cemetery at Gorakana. There

stands a woman with a child under a tree. She greets a passer-by with a request for him to hold the child. If the passer-by shows signs of fear or accepts the offer and carries the child, he dies. This happens only to the lone passer-by.

Motorists deserve a better fate, so they see neither the woman nor the child, but something makes them swerve at this spot and go over the edge. The number of accidents here is proof of this.

It is said that the use of as much bad language as possible in the loudest tone makes the woman disappear. She just cannot stand bad manners!

Kannatte Ghost

The third story narrated by Mr. J. was of a foreign lady, involved in an accident at Rosmead Place when she was travelling in a Taxi and died. Since then taxi drivers passing the Lych gate at the Kanatte Cemetery after dusk are halted by a 'white woman' who gets into the taxi and gives an address at Rosmead Place. When the taxi driver reaches the address finds there is no passenger. Next time a taxi driver refuses a fare at the Lych gate at Kanatte cemetery, you will know why.

Letter

Having read these three ghost stories, I wrote to "THE RECORD":—

"It is rather surprising that you found it fit for publication such silly 'motoring ghost stories' as given in the July issue of

THE RECORD. Surely such grand-mother stories, which are never verified and proved true, need not find a place in the pages of journals of the type of THE RECORD which are mainly meant to assist the users of a scientifically mechanised mode of transport of the modern age.

The fictitious nature of these ghost stories mentioned by Mr. J can be found by a careful reading of them. About the ghost of the woman and child at Gorakana he says, "If the passer-by shows signs of fear or accepts the offer and carries the child, he dies. This happens ONLY to the LONE passer-by. Motorists SEE NEITHER THE WOMAN NOR THE CHILD, but something makes them swerve AT THE SPOT AND GO OVER THE EDGE. The number of accidents here is PROOF of this. It is said that the use of as much BAD LANGUAGE as possible in the LOUDEST TONE makes the woman disappear". (Capitals mine).

Analysis

An analysis of the above narrative brings out the following facts and raises certain questions;—

- 1 As it happens only to lone passers-by, there are no eye-witnesses to these incidents.
- 2 The dead persons are the only ones who could have told others what really happened. As dead persons are incapable of speech and writing, how was the conclusion that they died as a result of fear or of carrying the child, arrived at? Cont.

EVEN SO, IT'S BETTER

Ian Smith racist Prime Minister of Rhodesia, recently took part in a pistol shooting contest in Salisbury and missed his target four times out of five. Even so, it's better than his other accomplishments, a wit quipped.

- 3 How did those, who are said to have survived after seeing the ghost, know that they would have died had they feared or carried the child?
- 4 The woman-ghost, like the Dadalla ghost, is capable of hearing although her ear-drums and the brain had decomposed long ago after death!
- 5 Since motorists see "neither the woman nor the child" it is rather absurd to attribute their cars 'going over the edge' to the woman and her child who are not there.
- 6 Many car accidents at one and the same spot can better be a proof of the unsuitable nature of the road than the presence of ghosts. In other countries such a state of affairs would normally attract the attention of Road Engineers but it appears that in Sri Lanka it would be a case for the 'kattadiyas' to rectify.

Which Doctors

- 7 Can the effective 'bad language' to be used be in any language? If so, is the woman ghost a multi-linguist? If not are those passers-by who are not proficient in that particular brand of 'bad language' doomed?
- 8 Can Mr. J supply a list of the lone persons found dead at this spot during a sufficient long period? Coroners' Inquest reports and or the local police station reports should furnish him with necessary information.
- 9 Has Mr. J taken into consideration the hundred or even thousands of motorists who pass this way at night throughout the year without meeting with any accident? I am one among those.

Dress leaves Ghost?

With regard to the Kanatte ghost Mr. J says, "Since then (the death of a foreign lady in a taxi accident) taxi drivers passing

the Lych gate at the Kanatte cemetery after dusk are halted by a 'white woman' who gets into the taxi and gives an address at Rosmead Place. When the taxi driver reaches the address he finds that there is no passenger."

Unlike the two other cases of Dadalla and Gorkana, where the persons concerned are no more living there should be many taxi drivers now living in the city of Colombo who are said to have had the misfortune of taking the ghost of the white woman to Rosmead Place.

It is not said whether the ghost of the 'white woman' appears dressed in her western costume or stark naked. If she is naked, it is not likely that the taxi driver would bodily accept a nude woman as fare, especially from the Lych gate of Kanatte cemetery. If, on the other hand, she was clad properly like a living woman, then we have to conclude that not only the dead woman has left her ghost behind, but the various items of her lifeless dress also have left theirs. The same applies to the 'white' dress of the Dadalla ghost who was capable of performing a race with the car although it had no bones and muscles. Or had it?

Alive or dead

From this woman-ghost's reported ability to speak to the taxi drivers, one has to infer that her vocal-chords, lungs, mouth, tongue and the speech-centre of the brain are still functioning although these organs have decomposed long ago and merged with the soil of the Kanatte cemetery. Or could it be that ghosts develop some sort of built-in gadget for reproducing speech, and thus setting up the necessary air-vibrations to enable others to hear?

I am still waiting to meet at least one of the 'many' taxi drivers in the City of Colombo who are said to have had the misfortune to take the vanishing ghost to Rosmead Place.

Subsequently I spent two nights with another person till 2-30 a.m. each night at Kanatte seated in my car parked just outside the Lych gate. We counted a total of 21 passengerless taxis passing up and down this spot. Not one was stopped by this or any other ghost during these two nights!

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN

MARGARAT BHATTY

As a school teacher I have been always been intrigued to see how young people become tainted with religious bigotry and prejudice. 'Miss, Christians are not nice. one of my seven-year-old pupils remarked to me. He was a Bengali Hindu, and an exceptionally bright lad who had won a merit scholarship to this very expensive public school founded initially for the sons of the rajas of Central India. "Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Muslims are bad"

"In Calcutta if you pass their churches they catch you and take you inside and cut off your top-knot and force you to lose caste by eating beef," he replied. This dated piece of mis-information, I found, had been given him by his father--a man I had met and thought to be educated.

"Muslims are bad," was another comment made to me by an older college-going boy who backed this claim with concrete evidence. "Just look at the way Pakistan has fought so many wars with us"

When I suggested that possibly Muslim boys of his age in Pakistan, looking at his country, could as easily come to the conclusion that Hindus are bad, he was indignant. How could Hindus be bad? he demanded.

Ignorance (In) Voluntary

On closer questioning I discovered that he had never known a single Muslim personally either in school or in college. His background was orthodox and his father a sub-Inspector of police did not conceal his RSS sympathies. It was not surprising, therefore, that the boy saw the Indo Pakistan wars as an extension of the seemingly endless confrontation between Hindu and Muslim.

Happening to catch the missionary broadcasting station FEBA from the Seychelles one morning on my radio, I heard the announcer introduce a Brother Bob who answers questions sent in by listeners. The first question was from a Christian boy in India who said that since he attended a Hindu school he was obliged to sit in classes

Cont.

THE RANSOM ISSUE

The Hamburg Finance Court recently ruled that "ransom paid by a businessman to his kidnappers must not be put to the company's expense account". What is not clear whether the kidnappers will keep their ransom at the old level or bear in mind that their rich victims are not too willing, as a rule, to part with money out of their own pocket.

where religion was taught. What should he do? Brother Bob's considered opinion was that he must stop his ears and never listen, or better still he should leave the class and go far off until the lesson was over.

It is easy to guess what effect such behaviour would have on the boy's classmates. Their indignation and fury probably remained with them for the rest of their lives. Brother Bob acted on the conventional Christian principle that in matters concerning other faiths ignorance is to be preferred to knowledge.

Belief Vs. Thought

In *Principles of Social Reconstruction*—Bertrand Russell has this to say: "The prevention of free inquiry is unavoidable so long as the process of education is to produce belief rather than thought, to compel the young to hold positive opinions on doubtful matters rather than to let them see the doubtfulness and be encouraged to independence of mind. Education ought to foster the wish for truth, not the conviction that some particular creed is the truth."

Ignorance breeds prejudice and hate and suspicion follow on that. We resent and even dislike people who appear too different from us. This natural hostility in our primitive ancestors was for reasons of self-preservation. Any alien group posed a threat until it was won over, placated or even subjugated. Modern education could remove the vestiges of this primitive hostility from people's minds but for religious bigotry and misconceptions about cultural differences. Politicians and racists know how easy it is to manipulate this fear of others who differ from us in colour, class or creed. This imprinting begins long before children even reach school-going age.

Fear and prejudice

It thought to be the concern of every right-minded educationist to see that the

books from which children study, or those they read for leisure, do not reinforce this fear. Yet how sensitive are our writers to this point?

In a book on *Social Studies in Delhi* I came across the following:

"Hindus are vegetarians and revere the cow as their Mother. But Christians and Muslims eat beef." Both these statements are half-truths. But worse than that, their very juxtaposition has in it enormous potential for planting fear and suspicion in impressionable minds.

Ethics without Religion

Any writer who is seriously interested in the production of wholesome rationalist literature for children in this country is faced with the dilemma of discovering for himself a certain basic ethic which is not identifiable with any particular religion. It is his business to find those humanistic principles which are not limited by caste, creed or community. In a sense it means trying to discover a sound basic Indian-ness which can be recognised as the national character.

Sociologists are against such flattening out of social, cultural and religious differences in the interests of homogeneity. But to eradicate many of the social evils prevalent in Indian society, it seems almost inevitable that literature for children needs to do just that. Characters in stories and plays would then be truer to life than they are now. The dhobi, bania and shoemaker would not be the dhobi, bania or shoemaker but individual beings without reference to their caste or religion. The basic intrinsic worth of people would emerge because they are humans and not because they are Harijans, Christians, Muslims or Hindus.

No perception of Character

What is the tendency that prevails today? Most Indians seem to think in stereotypes,

"What I cannot understand about my people," writes Nirad Chaudhuri "Is their extraordinary insensitiveness to points of character. 'He is a good or bad man' is the final summing-up of a man's character with us, and I have hardly been able to get any idea of another man's personality from the talk I hear second-hand about him."

Such lack of perception about true character, Chaudhuri thinks, comes not from lack of social education, but from something else interwoven with the very structure of our character. "Hindu society never learned to value a man as an individual and as a personality, without reference to his worldly status." This status is derived from his caste, religion, wealth and even colour. I once heard a young girl describe the man chosen to be her future husband as "He's dark, but he's nice" a comment which told me much about herself but nothing about him!

Stereotyping

In regimented societies as we have in India the individual is rarely distinct. He becomes a stereotype. He is described with reference to his status and a suitable label of Christian, Muslim, Jain etc., is attached to him for easier reference even though he might have turned atheist and does not even profess his faith any longer.

Stereotyping is based on generalisations which are neither fair nor true. It is a lazy way of thinking and probably that is why it abounds in our films and literature. Children are culturally-conditioned to think this way from earliest childhood, first by their parents and then in school. Stereotyping teaches them to make distinctions between people and people on a basis of superficial knowledge. It does not inculcate in them that sense of kinship which we all need to have as a nation and a people. And yet oneness and kinship is what nationhood is about.

World-view

Writers for children need to break these stereotype moulds and promote humanist principles of thought. In a world where conflict seems on the increase it is imperative that the young should be taught that their own particular culture is not the only rational invention. There are many others also which are working effectively simply because cultures are not based on truth but on faith. And having once gained this world-view, it ought to be possible to help children to see that faith can function effectively with reason and humanism to make the world a happier place than it is at present.

WELL LOOKED AFTER

The International Bank For Reconstruction and Development, whose official function is to aid developing countries, is showing profound concern for the well-being of its staff members. The salaries of more than 2,000 of them are nearly 50,000 a year. That's a great deal more than what the employees of the biggest New York banks received.

A CONFRO- NATION WITH GHOST



DINESH NETTAR

B — Believer G — Ghost

B — 'Hey, holy Ghost, you are the greatest.....'

G — 'Hold on, hold on, you see, I don't even exist.'

B — 'But of course, you do. I have seen you.'

G — 'Seen me? Where? When?'

B — 'Near the Velacheri burial ground, shrouded in white, eerie, on a new moon night.'

G — 'But why should I come in white? Black, I think would produce a better effect.'

B — 'If you are black, how can I see you on a new moon night?'

G — 'Why, I could come on moon-lit nights.'

B — 'No, no. Then the people won't be scared to go near the burial ground. See, they are scared of darkness, and so I will be alone when I see you on a new moon night.'

G — 'If you say that you saw me, how could you prove it?'

B — 'Bah, a proof is never needed. If they are scared, that's enough. Someone else coming near that place by mistake will automatically imagine you. That would be sufficient.'

G — 'But still, why should they be scared of me?'

B — 'Because I say that you suck their blood.....'

G — 'But their blood suckers are in the temples and ashrams.'

B — (ignoring) 'And I tell them that you throw stones, move chairs and tables in houses etc.'

G — 'How could I do that? Even if I did exist, I would have no form nor shape.'

B — 'That is not correct. You would look like a human. Two hands, two legs, a head, two eyes, a mouth etc.'

Cont.

G—' But I need not look like that. I might as well look like a cow or even a bucket '

B—' If you looked like a cow, I wouldn't be scared. I would feel like tying you to a tree and milking you; and if you looked like a bucket, I would like to kick the bucket (pardon the pun) '

G—' But you see.... '

B—' I am scared only of humans. That is why I shaped even my gods like humans.'

G—' But even then I couldn't have any energy. I am only a spirit.'

B—' That's enough. You are the spirit and you have the spirit. Will power can move mountains.'

G—' But I thought that according to science, no energy can exist without matter.'

B—' Blast that science. I know a thousand scientists who believe in you. It is the IRA that I don't like. Those chaps are really after you.'

G—' You nut, they are not after me, they are after repairing your nut. Stop imagining and start thinking.'

WIZARD OF NAPLES

"A chille D'Angillo, whose reputed powers to cure diseases made him a celebrated figure in Rome, died of cancer in a Rome hospital on Friday night, aged 64.

"D'Angelo known as the "wizard of Naples" claimed to have cured Italy's ex-Queen of blindness in 1953.

"Among his powers he claimed the ability to tell the names of people he did not know, to identify criminals he had never seen, and to read thoughts.

"He earned a fortune visiting Paris in 1951, where some newspapers attributed him with Supernatural powers.

"For the past few years, however he had lain in bed in a Rome hospital by paying his fees by continuing to practise wizardry on people who visited him in his ward".

(Ceylon Daily Mirror)

The "Wizard" who had "Supernatural" powers to cure other people's ailment could not cure himself! Even in his death bed he lived on the credulity of simpletons!

(Courtsey-The Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador)

"PSYCHO-SOMATIC STRUCTURE OF MIRACLES"

By **P. K. Narayanan**

(Majestic Printing Press, Nagpur for IRA
Madras. 45 pp. Rs. 5)

Book Review by

M/s **Margaret Bhatt**

The author is vice-president of the IRA and advisor to the Nagpur branch of the association. In January of 1977 he presented a paper under this title at the All-India Atheist Conference at Nidamaru and a briefer version was carried in the May number of FREETHOUGHT. The book has a forward by Dr. C. G. Pande, President, Nagpur IRA and Head of the Department of Psychology, Nagpur University.

Materialistic Structure

Mr. Narayanan bases his analysis on Pavlovian findings of materialistic structure and the functioning of the nervous system and presents a scientific and objective thesis on this challenging theme: "The innocent and the gullible experience miracles out of their deranged conditions", he writes. "The crooks and the cheats make miracles out of their wickedness". And that is all there is to it."

However, there is a great deal more to it when one reads Mr. Narayanan's explanation of this intriguing subject in a country where godmen and miracle workers flourish like congress grass. It is written simply enough for any layman to understand.

Definition of Miracle

Rejecting as far-fetched and contradictory the various definitions of the term "miracle" put forward by religious people, he defines it more precisely as "an event or an occurrence beyond the level of being objectively understood by an individual or a group of individuals at a given time."

From this we may conclude, firstly, that miracles depend on an individual or group of individuals who claim to experience them, and secondly, the nature of these occurrences depends on "the cerebral attitude and environmental conditions of the perceivers."

This explains why Hindus experience Hindu miracles, Christians have Christian visions and so on all of which place miracles squarely where they belong within the human mind itself. They are not from without but within. Neither are they external experiences of divinity or any other supernatural manifestation.

The author then lucidly describes the nature of sensation, Perception, the formation of Concepts and finally the continuing process of evaluation which is our faculty of judgment. This process completes the cognitive function in humans. It is when there is a distortion of this process that miracles and other phenomena are supposedly perceived. Such cognitive disturbances give rise to illusions, hallucinations and other derangement further intensified by the presence of deep-rooted delusions.

Hypnotic Process

Chapter IV is an interesting analysis of the hypnotic process and its true character with reference to sleep along with its use in master-minding miracles. Mr. Narayan himself is an accomplished hypnotist and known to rationalists as Professor Hypno. He has used his talent in the treatment of behavioural disorders with success. Hypnosis has always been a part of religious ritual from ancient days, and the over-excitation of the cerebral hemispheres with the use of furious and fervent rhythms on drums and cymbals, singing, clapping and dancing all quickly induce state of auto-hypnosis in devotees which makes them receptive to any kind of suggestions. They then equate the intensity of their experiences with true piety.

With the kind of scientific insight given by the author into the working of the human mind it is easy to understand how godmen like Sai Baba have achieved success. When the cerebral functions are deranged there appear limitless possibilities for miraculous happenings, and Mr. Narayanan has aptly headed the next chapter "Miracles Galore."

The materialisation of *vibhuti* and other objects by sleight-of-hand and other tricks play on the credulity of the devotees and

induce illusions in them which they take to be miracles. Here the author makes a significant point: Whereas a godman creates the atmosphere and stage-manages it with his skill, his devotees experience much more through self-induced hallucinations. In a hypnotised haze they see him with a halo, or walking on air, and they experience other symptoms of hysterical origin which they believe to be miraculous but which any psychiatrist would easily recognise as derangement.

Miraclemen, says Mr. Narayanan, like the miracles they induce or promote, are frauds and cheats manipulating and exploiting people. But all these miracles attributed to godmen, stigmatic saints, faith-healers and wonder-workers are "not an expression of reality or a reflection of the outside objective world." They are symptoms of a deranged consciousness in people who are victims not only of godmen, but of their own morbid and warped religious delusions.

Psycho-somatic Structure of Miracles is a book which should be read by all rationalists committed to seeing commonsense and reason prevail in Indian society.

REFERENDUM ON REFERENDUMS

Swiss voters go to polls almost every week on national or local issues. Recently they were asked to vote on a proposal to cut the number of referendums. The referendum showed that most of the voters favoured it.

Story of a Bad Man who Shook the Heavens

By Mukund

Once upon a time there lived a bad man. He was corrupt, cunning, crooked, mean, selfish, immoral, unscrupulous, shameless, ruthless, hopeless and what not. However, he was strong, clever and always successful. People talked a lot against him and wondered about his success. "What is God doing?", some asked. Others explained that it was due to the accumulated merit of his previous birth. But since one can fool only mortals and not God, they were sure that he would be punished some day or other. But the chap went on well and finally died also in prosperity. Then they said, "God shall not spare him now."

Normally, what happens to human beings after death is not known. But there are exceptions and our bad man happened to be one of them. The account of later life somehow reached the earth. It was not disclosed by religious authorities for a long time and yet, it came to be leaked out. The story available runs like this:

Chitragupta's Headache

After death, the man was produced before Chitragupta. All sinners at this stage, repent and cry. But this man looked quite cheerful.

In appearance and by manners, he was impressive and pleasing. Further, his spokesmanship was so convincing that Chitragupta could not but form a favourable opinion and take fancy for him. Then Chitragupta went through the personal file of the man and was simply shocked. All sins and no merit; everything contrary to the impression formed. But since big men do not change their opinions so suddenly, Chitragupta became doubtful about the record. The Dealing Assistant was called, who politely argued to justify the correctness. But since clerks have the habit of organising defence against any charge, right or wrong, Chitragupta refused to be convinced. "Please re-examine and put up again", was the order verbally given.

The entire Section was upset as the file came back. Where was the mistake? Nobody could find any. The worried Assistant went through the file again and again, only to be convinced that everything was in order. Why was the boss then displeased? But then suddenly he caught the point. His notings were not wrong. They were inconvenient to the boss. Now, he decided to do the needful. He knew the method. It was to side track the main issue and highlight some minor point of interest. Once he initiates the matter in a particular line, all above him would simply go on dittoing the same, for erring on the safer side. Now he understood why the highest boss had called him.

Act of kindness

The bad man had actually never given anything to anyone without exploiting something more in return. But then there was one instance. Once when he threw away some leftovers of rice, a part of it was received by a crow. The Assistant pointed out that this was a genuine act of charity, to be suitably rewarded, and elaborated his argument into one full note sheet. The Superintendent supported that note as quite

reasonable and the officer above, forwarded the file with a remark, "C. G. may kindly consider". Now everything was in order. Chitrugupta received the file, went through the notings and smiled. The man was called and told, "You seem to be one of the worst sinners. You have to undergo several years of torture in the Hell".

"But my Lord, you are great and merciful. I have full faith in you. You will do something for me".

"I have to go by rules. You will get what your karma deserves".

"But my Lord.....".

Chitrugupta's Offer

"You see, there is something in your favour according to this file, for which you can be rewarded. You can get whatever you desire, but only for a period of one second. That is the maximum".

"But my Lord, within your powers....."
"Within my powers, I can give you a choice. Tell me whether you would like to enjoy the reward first or to undergo the punishment first. In any case, you can't escape punishment."

"I would like the reward first".
Sudden came the reply. The man had presence of mind and took quick decisions in his own interest.

"Chitrugupta was impressed by the smartness and was curious to know what the man would ask for. So he declared, 'Ask whatever you want. It shall be yours for a period of one second'".

Kamadhenu Order

"I want Kamadhenu, the desire-yielding cow".

"Let Kamadhenu be at your service for one second". The order was passed. And there stood the real Kamadhenu asking the bad man, "What can I do for you, Sir?"

"I want you to push your two horns straight into Chitrugupta's belly".

"O.K.", said Kamadhenu and started to attack.

Unaware Chitrugupta was taken aback. He jumped from the chair, shouting, screaming, running round and round for life, while the cow was chasing him. At the top of his voice he was telling her, "What are you doing? This man is a rogue, rascal, sinner. He was condemned to hell. I did some favour to him out of pity".

"Why did you do it? To satisfy your vanity? Now I don't know anything I have to fulfil his desire. That is my duty. I do my duty and do not take personalities into consideration".

"But that was to be done within a second. Now a long time has passed. Please stop now Stop at once", said Chitrugupta while running and gasping. But Kamadhenu did not agree.

The bad man was quietly observing the show. There was a big commotion, all had left their seats in panic. Flash messages were sent to various gods. Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Indra and many others rushed to the spot. They tried to persuade the cow but in vain. They could have finished the bad man but who could withdraw the cow except himself? Ultimately they advised Chitrugupta to appeal to the man for mercy, which the exhausted and desperate Chitrugupta did.

Bad man's terms

But the bad man said, "I will do it on one condition".

"What is that? Please tell quickly".

"You must write off all my sins and send me to heaven".

"Oh Gods! How is it possible? Nobody can escape karma..... But...yes, yes..... I will do it. I give promise, withdraw the cow first".

"No. I don't believe in promises. Give it in writing".

"I will pass the order in file".

"No that is not enough. I know the difference between the cup and the lip. You must get the final order issued and hand it

over to me. Then only the cow will be withdrawn".

In heaven

Poor Chitrugupta had to concede everything. In a great hurry the order was put up, signed and issued. Within a moment the bad man became an honorable member of the heaven!

The matter could not end here. It was a big shock to the gods. It had challenged the very bonafides of the heavenly administration. Indra had to call an emergency meeting of all the gods to discuss the situation and take adequate action for the future.
(To be Continued)

SHAKUNTALA DEVI - A MIRACLE ?



DINESH NETTAR

I am sure that most of you have heard of Shakuntala Devi. She is supposed to be faster than the computers. She has given

demonstrations of this in India and abroad and has been a wonder for everybody. A large number of newspapers and magazines have written of her and a German company even presented her a Mercedes car in admiration of her performance.

Close behind these reports I find the people by and large believing her to be a miracle with 'gifted powers'. People consider this power to be supernatural. Does she really 'think' faster than a computer? She is perhaps very fast when compared to other humans, and so a wonder, but I would like to strongly dispute her being faster than a computer.

I have never met her, but I have certainly met computers. My familiarity with them does not make me believe an iota of this 'supernatural' phenomenon. I will show why I think so.

Let us take the simple argument about the speed of communication. A modern computer can read cards at more than a thousand characters (a character is a letter,

digit, or a mark like comma, plus, bracket etc.) a second. It can print about 2000 characters per second. Between its auxiliary memory and working space, it can transfer information at 50,000 to 200,000 characters per second. For the human, it takes a minimum of 1/20th second for the external impulse to reach the brain, from the eye, ear etc. Similarly, it takes an equally long time for the message to reach the mouth etc. from the brain.

Let us see its speed of computation. To add two 5-digit numbers, the slowest mini-computer takes 1/200,000 of a second. The fast computers can do about 10-30 million additions of 10-20 digit numbers in a second. They can retrieve numbers from their main memory at the same speed. This speed cannot be estimated for the human, since all the speed achieved in this is masked by the slowness in communication.

However, if the length of computation is increased by increasing the number of computations to a few million, we can test this speed. One such test was apparently done. I will give the details.

She was given a 203-digit number and asked to calculate the 23rd root of the number—i.e., the answer multiplied by itself 22 times will give that 203-digit number. She took only 50 seconds beating the computer by 10 seconds. Since the answer was given, I set about working the problem on our computer.

It is obvious that the 23rd root of 203-digit number has 9 digits in it. Since in all these problems the root is exact, it is clear that only the first 9 digits are sufficient to find out the final answer. I took the 9-digit number (let us call it N) and computed the first 16-digits of its 23rd power in our computer. I also took the 23rd powers of $N-1$ and $N+1$. These three numbers were different in the 7th digit from the left, indicating that even the original estimate of 9 digits is high. The 23rd root of this 23rd power was calculated by the computer in 0.01 second (if it took less time, I would not know, since 0.01 second is the smallest time it bills a customer for) and the answer printed in 0.1 second. I only wish to meet the great German who operated his computer.

I must add that the computer unbiasedly takes 23rd or 873rd what-you-willth roots of numbers, integers or fractions, perfect roots or not. But Shakuntala Devi can handle only integers, that too only when the answers are exact and without fractions.

The computer is also error-free (in spite of the malicious stories spread by the ignorant) and can do billions of calculations without a single error. In addition, it can control such varied external devices like medical diagnosis and monitoring, chemical process, traffic signalling, radio-communication etc. thousands of times faster than an expert human. Had it been Shakuntala Devi instead of the computers at NASA, men would never have landed on the moon.

SLIPPERY SPIRITS

*"Spirits are as slippery as eels to feel;
So, would you catch a spirit—Coch—ineal
"Courtesy: "Punch"*

The Sneaking Sprit



DINESH NETTAR

One Mr. X told me how somebody read his mind. He was asked to think of a fruit. Clever Mr. X, knowing that this mind-reader could not read English, thought of 'apple'. Presto, the mind-reader said, 'You thought of apple.' I told Mr. X that I had the same powers and I could 'read' his mind. I asked him to give me the names of

eight flowers, and I wrote them down in eight slips of paper, rolled them into balls. In my absence, he picked one of them. The remaining seven were burnt and the ashes dispersed beyond my sight. Clever Mr. X again, did not open the ball in his hand, but still I mentioned the name of the flower in the slip of paper he picked. He opened it and what else—I was right on target. After getting his word that he was thoroughly impressed (Since I was not wearing a saffron robe, he did not touch my feet), I explained the trick.

I had written the name of the same flower on all the slips. It was good for me that the seven unpicked slips were burnt, since all evidence of my trick was destroyed. I used some psychology too, since asked to name 8 flowers, 99.99 per cent people will mention rose, jasmine and lotus among them. So I wrote jasmine in all, ignoring whatever he said he did mention jasmine).

The same trick was played upon him by the mind-reader. Anybody speaking English would think of 'apple', since that is the first word he learns. ('A' for apple). The correct method to defeat such feats is to think of names like adabudukaga or katamalana (I don't know if these words mean anything in any language) and strongly contend that this is the name of a flower, or a fruit in Swahili or Katanga. Similarly, if someone asks you to think of a colour or a digit, don't think of red or 5 what more than 80 per cent people would do.

P.S.—the above trick was taught to me by my father when I was a kid.

PARITAL GOD

In the air crash near Forhat Morarji said that he was saved by 'God' as 'God' had something to be got done through him which 'He' could not do himself:

God could not get done anything through the crew of five who were all killed!

S. V. Kirloskar

NEWS

&

NOTES

'They lost faith in God'

By M J Kamalakaran

The biggest casualty of Andhra cyclone was peoples faith in God. At Narukullapadu village, near Guntur, devotees called off a programme of all-night bhajan to Rama on Kartik Ekadasi after the storm put an end to their happiness. Pledges to the local temple were withdrawn.

Courtesy: Illustrated weekly,
25-12-1977

1978 IHEU Congress In England

An interesting combination of the old and the new, that is Guildford, the town where the IHEU will hold its world congress this year. The University of Surrey will accommodate some 300 humanists from all over the world when they meet there on July 31st to August 4, 1978.

The theme of the congress, which will be presided over by Prof. Sir Alfred Ayer, will be Work for Human Needs in a Just Society which will be covered in three plenary sessions.

1. Scene setting-the goals, the realities, the context
2. Coming to focus-some key issues
3. The way forward

Additional groups are envisaged to meet the need of people who would like to discuss topics which are not related to the congress theme, E.g. 'Cults of unreasons' or 'bioethics.'

Sati in 1978

India—a country where the heroines are victims: Case of "Sati"

January—18: Sikar (Rajasthan) A 45-year old woman committed "Sati" Saturday in the Hathidah village, 100 km. from here.

She is alleged to have jumped into the pyre of her husband, Hira Lal Chaudhry, in the presence of a large number of people from nearby villages.

The police have arrested two villagers under section 306 IPC in this connection.

The residents of Hathidah have decided to erect a memorial to the woman.

'Times of India' January 19th

Population (De) Control ?

"What are your views about abortion as a method of Population control?" This question was put to Raj Narayan, Union Health Minister by Y.K. Sapru in an article appearing in Femina entitled Using Mythology for Birth Control:

"Coming back to his favourite subject Hindu mythology, he narrated the story of Abhimanyu who had learnt a certain technique of warfare while still in his mother's womb but the knowledge was not complete as his mother fell asleep while the technique was being explained. He also gave details of

another case where a child, while still in his mother's womb, had mastered Sanskrit because he heard his parents converse in that language. In short, from the day of conception a child becomes a conscious, living individual and an abortion would morally amount to committing a murder.

In another section of this article, the Minister said: "Sita lived for 13 long years with Ram, yet they had only two children Lav and Kush. Did Ram go in for a vasectomy or Sita for the loop? Lakshman also had only two children. How did all these people mentioned in our scriptures have one or two children only?"

"It was through self-control and the practice of brahmacharya that family sizes were kept to the minimum by our ancestors. This is an inherent part of our cultural heritage as can be seen in almost all books on Hindu mythology."

ATTACK ON RATIONALISTS

The M. P. Rationalist Association, in a letter to the Chief Minister of Kerala has strongly deplored the attack by the religious goondas on rationalists at Guruvayoor on 26-12-1977. The rationalists were protesting against the plating of the temple with 120 kg. of gold, worth Rs. 1 crore.

Mr. Asghar Engineer's cancelled Lecture

Some religious fanatics have caused the lecture by Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer on 'Humanism and Islam' at the Bangalore University to be cancelled.

Certain Hindu revivalists prevailed upon the obscurantists among Muslims to approach

the Governor, Mr. Govind Narain, the Chancellor and give him a wrong version that Mr. Ali was anti-Islam.

It is a virtual insult to Mr. Engineer, a writer of all-India repute and a Bohra reformist. It is also not befitting of the University to take up sides and yield to the pressure of obscurantists.

A number of organisations in Bombay including the Bombay Rationalist Association have sent telegrams to the Governor protesting against this action of the Chancellor. Progressive Muslims in Bangalore have also lodged their protest. The Karnataka Rationalist Association has written to the Karnataka Education Minister asking him to see that the University renews its invitation to Mr. Engineer.

Ananda Marg's Tactics

The Delhi Rationalist Association has passed a resolution strongly appealing to the Government of India not to surrender to the Anand Margi threatening tactics for getting Mr. Sarkar released. It has urged the Government not to be misled by the false rumours that it has a great following in India and abroad.

Sai vs. Science

In a speech at Sunderbai Hall (Bombay) on 30-12-1977 Saibaba, attacked the study of science as the cause of all violence and tensions in the world. He is obviously stupid enough to forget how dependent he is on science—the car and aeroplane he travels in, the watches he 'materialises', the microphone he speaks through, the photographs of his with his bhakthas and so on are all products of science and technology, and not of anybody's divine achievement.

Rationalist Wins Suit

A Hindu bhaktha sued Kasturi, an advocate, president, Coimbatore District Rationalist Forum, in the Court of the Subordinate Judge, Coimbatore on an alleged contract that he was to be paid Rs. 10,000 if he succeeded in getting a verdict that God exists!

A debate "whether God exists or not" was held in the presence of Gora, Andhra Athiest Leader. Kasturi debated that there is no God. The umpire of the debate held that God exists. The bhaktha sued Kasturi on an alleged contract that Rs. 10,000 was payable to him as the umpire had held that god exists. But the Court found against the bhaktha and dismissed the suit with costs of the advocate.

Jawahar Nagar Branch

Dr. Usha Kaushal, Medical Officer Gujarat Refinery has been elected President of Jawaharlalnagar Branch, of Gujarat Rationalist Association.

Mad ventare decried

Baba Jai Gurudev camped in Gujarat for one and a half months to organise Saket Satya

Yuga. He claimed that in his Yagna 33 crores of gods would attend. He could enlist the support of politicians and to the surprise and shock of enlightened people of Gujarat, the Chief Minister Babubhai Patel, Union Minister Raj Narain, Ex M.P. Piloo Modi, 'graced' the occasion and eulogised Baba's mad venture.

The Rationalists backed by Arya Samaj and other social organisations led a protest procession in Ahmedabad led by Shri Narendra Dave, General Secretary of Ahmedabad Branch of Rationalist Association and others. At a meeting at Ahmedabad presided by Mr. Kamalashanker Pandya, President of Indian Rationalist Association it was decided to counteract Baba's poisonous propaganda by wall posters and writings and 'anti' slogans were inscribed on the walls of buildings at Ahmedabad. The people watched this poster war with curiosity. The Baba demanded the attendance of Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai when he was in Ahmedabad, but the P.M. did not oblige.

Gujarat Branch

Dr. Girish B. Patel, M.S. eminent Urologist of Gujarat has been elected as President of the Gujarat Branch of the Indian Rationalist Association

How Ghosts Are Made and unmade

"Materializations" are always dishonest. Every materializing medium has been found out. Almost since the birth of the movement there have been, and are today, hundreds of these men and women, paid and unpaid, who have masqueraded as ghosts; or duped their sitters in a dull red light with muslin and butter cloth and phosphorized paper, with dolls and masks and stuffed gloves and stockings and rubber arms. If spiritualists would persuade us that they are scrupulously honest, they must drive the last of these people out of their fold, and they must expunge every reference to these materializations from their literature. When we get such phenomena with a medium who has been searched by competent and independent witnesses, whose body openings have been sealed and clothing changed, in a cabinet set up by independent inquirers, with each hand and foot controlled by a separate man, or in a good light, we may begin to talk. Never yet has the faintest suggestions of a phenomenon been secured under such circumstances. (Courtesy : Is spiritualism based on Fraud ?)

Critique of "What Becomes of the Soul After Death?"

[Com. A. S. K.]

Rebirth

May, I, in all humility submit that this difference between two children born of the same parents is a matter that phrenology—a science that is today in a very advanced stage—is still investigating and has little to do with any theory of "re-birth". At least no scientist has made the bold assertion like Sivananda.

"Rebirth is life's sustaining force, even from the worldly point of view. So many dreams and so many eagerly sought after ambitions remain unfulfilled.....a remote expectation that perhaps in another birth those dreams may be fulfilled. So, even from this point of view, rebirth is indeed a gentle consolation and a solace to life" (Page 7—Underlining mine).

So the Swamiji asks us to live in a paradise of our imagination if for nothing else, at least to have your fill of life on this planet. If you had not already had it!

Ghosts and Apparitions

"There is another school of thought which believes that the sledge-hammer of death puts a final end to life, the body and the soul passes out into the five elements in ultimate oblivion. This convenient belief is very appealing to some intellectual sophists. But if such be the case then what is to account for the apparitions and the undeniable experience at a seance? Hence life after death cannot be ruled out?"

What are "apparitions" but the allucination of a morbid mentality or spiritual

meomania! "Apparitions" arise also out of a fear-complex. For instance, in the villages of our country, all sorts of ghosts and hobgoblins used to pester the poor illiterate rustics. But when the village was electrified, the ghosts and apparitions took to their heels. These ghosts and apparitions are obviously allergic to urban cities, and they are seldom found there. This is a fact of life.

Seances

In so far as "Seances" are concerned, the less said about them, the better. It is a huge hoax played on the gullible and the fool, and at any rate, to my knowledge none of the 'great' philosophers of India, Buddha, Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Ramakrishna Paramahansa or Swami Vivekananda ever said a word about so-called "Seances". There is nothing "undeniable" about it.

If the Swamiji draws his conclusion that life after death cannot be ruled out on the basis of "apparitions" and "Seances" I can only say that he is not on terra firma.

The 'Swamiji' is a thousand times right when he says:

"Man has a tremendous potentiality within himself.

He is not the slave of fate". (Page 8).

Too true! How else can you account for the countless millions of inventions and discoveries of technology and science that have harnessed Nature the the elements, making Man and Monarch of all he surveys. Unfortunately Jules Verne did not live to see Man landing on the Moon, he could only think of him as going round the world.

To be contd.....

A. S. K.

Mystery of Raps

In March 1848, a Mr. and Mrs. Fox of Hydesville, a very small town of the State of New York, had their domestic peace disturbed by mysterious and repeated rappings, apparently on their walls and floors. Swedenborgians and Shakers had by that time familiarized people with the idea of spirit, and the neighbours were presently informed that the raps took an intelligent form, and replied "Yes" or "No" (by a given number of raps) to questions. The Foxes stated that the raps came from the spirit of a murdered man, and later they said that they had dug and found human bones. These raps were clearly associated with the two girls, Margaretta (aged fifteen) and Katie or Cathie (aged twelve). A third, a married elder sister named Leah at that time Mrs. Fish, and later Mrs. Underhill came to Hydesville and at her return to Rochester took Margaretta with her. Leah herself was presently a "medium". The excitement in rural America was intense. Mediums sprang up on every side, and the Foxes were in such demand that they could soon charge a dollar a sitter. The "Spirits", having at last discovered a way of communicating with the living, rapped out all sorts of messages to the sitters. In a few years table turning, table titling, levitation, etc. were developed, but the "foundation of the religion" was as I have described in 1848.

Towards the close of 1850 three professors of Buffalo University formed the theory that the Fox girls were simple frauds causing the supposed raps by cracking their knee joints. At a trial sitting they so placed the legs and feet of the girls that no raps could be produced. A few months later a relative, Mrs. Gulver, made a public statement, which was published in the New York Herald (April 17, 1851), that Margaretta Fox had admitted the fraud to her, and had shown her how it was done.

(Courtesy : Is Spiritualism based on fraud ?)

INDIAN ROPE TRICK

The Indian rope trick is the sea-serpant of the Plains, and like the mythical monster of the deep, varies in its form, appearances and disappearances.

Occasionally a wandering fakir would, while I was travelling through the country, dad to feats exhibited to a singularly uncritical audience by throwing up a rope in the air. But the proverbial boy squatting complacently at the fakir's feet, never once climbed the rope, disappearing in the azure distance. On the contrary, according to my observation, he remained where he squatted and the rope came down to earth again just in the same way as it would have done if thrown by you or me.

My investigations certainly tended to convince me that the rope trick was a myth of myths, and probably had its origin in the highly coloured imagination of some gullible storyteller.

[Courtesy 'Spiritualism—The inside truth'—By Stuart Cumberland]

ATHEISM

Yash V. Lokhandwala

(President, Bombay Rationalist Association)

The word 'atheism' has been described as the belief in no god. It therefore becomes necessary to understand the concept of God before discussing the validity of the theory of atheism.

God is said to be the creator and keeper of the world. I, for one, strongly oppose the concept of an immortal and mighty God. The widespread belief that God is a fountain of peace, spirituality, love and faith is utterly ridiculous.

It has been scientifically proved that man has evolved from the ape and the first microscopic living thing came into being by way of chemical evolution. A Russian Scientist, A. A. Oparin, produced this simple organism in the laboratory from non-living matter. But then, you may put forth the argument who created the universe, even before life came into existence. In reply to this query of yours, I would like to quote an accident. During a discussion on this topic, I raised the point that faith in the so-called God was ex-

plained by the fact that faith began only when reason ended. A gentleman then told me to take God on an absolutely different metre. Don't think of god as a huge being with infinite powers, but think of him as an atom, a dimension.

Concept of God

As propounded by the late Gora, an eminent atheist, the atheists believe that sages and thinkers thousands of years ago created an imaginary being called god to instill fear into the people, to make them desist from crime and to make society more cohesive and peaceful. This concept of god was useful in three ways. Firstly, it provided a ready answer, to every question in the form of god's creation and God's will. Secondly it supplied a sanction for moral conduct in the form of hope of heaven and fear of hell. Thirdly, it could be moulded conveniently for any theme of fine arts. In spite of its usefulness, the concept of god is a falsehood. Like every other falsehood, it corrupted mankind by importing superstition and fanaticism into the belief in god. Therefore, the existence of god should be discarded as every other falsehood in order to promote truthful life and real social harmony.

Atheism is indeed the correct way of life,

TURNING TO THE STARS

More and more Americans are pinning their hopes for the future on predictions by astrologers and fortune-tellers. A recent Gallup poll showed that 32 million adult Americans believed in astrology. Horoscopes have grown enormously in popularity. A generation ago, when there were more dailies than now, writes the New York Times, only about 100 carried them regularly but today some 1,250 do. It is a pity. Isn't it?

CAN GOD EXIST WITHOUT AN AGENT?

By MUKUND

There is one interesting instance from tribal history that throws light on the nature and psychology of religion. It is about the Khamptis who are a small tribe of Shan race settled in the north-eastern India. They are Hinayana Buddhists migrated from Burma in the middle of the 18th century.

In 1839 A. D. the Khamptis revolted against the British at Sadiya, and massacred the latter's troops. As a result, some Khamptis were driven back to Burma and some others were deported down the Brahmaputra and later allowed to settle in the Narayanpur area of Assam where their descendents still exist.

The Khamptis who first came to Narayanpur had no Buddhist priests with them. Therefore, they did not know how to practise their religion. Vaishnavism prevailed in that area and there was no conflict between the two faiths. So temporarily the Khamptis accepted the faith of the Vaishnava Satra of Majuli. But no sooner their relationship with the other Khamptis in Sadiya and Burma was restored then they went back to Buddhism.

This is an instance of tolerance, no doubt. But it is not a case of mere conversion and reconversion. It is one of a provisional affiliation of minds to some other spiritual authority in the absence of the desired one. It shows how people are not much bothered about the meaning of nature of religion and yet consider religion a 'must' for existence. It also means that religion cannot exist without an authority that represents God. No agent, no religion. And no religion means no sense of belonging, no emotional support to life and no social bond. Hence any agent of God is better than no agent. The religious mind is so deluded that it feels nervous without a dependence on some 'sacred' authority.

ROBOT — MATHEMATICIAN

Leningrad (APN): The "Robot-Mathematician", developed by the researchers of the Leningrad Technological Institute and the Cyberneticians of the Leningrad University has assumed the role of a middleman between the man and the computer. Having received the statements, the logical system chooses the ways of solving the problem, finds algorithms and makes a programme for the computer without the operator's interference. In a few hours electronics copes with what used to take researchers months of intensive work. The researchers only have to formulate the problem exactly.

DANCING FURNITURE

In 1846 all Paris was busy discussing "the electric girl" Little Angelique Cottin, a village child of thirteen summers, a very quiet and guileless-looking maid, exuded the "electric fluid" (ghosts were not yet in fashion) in such abundance that the furniture almost danced about the room. When she rose from her chair it flew back even if a man held it and was often smashed. A heavy dining-table went over at a touch from her dress. A chair held by "several strong men"

was pushed back when she sat on it. The Paris Academy of Sciences examined her, and could make nothing of her. The chairs she rose from were sent crashing against the wall, and broken. But one night, when the crowd gathered about her to see the marvels a wicked old sceptic watched her closely from a distance. Only that afternoon a heavy dining-table, with its load of dishes had gone over. The child saw the sceptic's eye yet wanted to entertain the crowd. There was a struggle of patience between sceptic and child for two hours, and at last she won. He saw her move, and demanded an examination; and they found the bruise on her leg caused by knocking over the heavy table. It was all over. She had developed a marvelous way of using the muscles of her legs and buttocks instantaneously and imperceptibly: This was, says Flammarion, "the end of this sad story in which so many people had been duped by a poor idiot."

WITCH DOCTOR

[Chocos are an Indian Group inhabiting the jungle zone between Panama Canal and Colombia—Ed.]

The Chocos believe that everything in nature has a soul—not only men and animals, but also trees and stones. For instance, when an Indian cuts down a tree, he has to go about it in a prescribed manner, so that the spirit living in the tree can do him no harm. A big tree contains a bigger and more dangerous spirit than a little one. Many sicknesses and misfortunes are the result of some mistake in dealing with these nature-spirits.

In the jungle there are also spirits wandering without a home. These are the souls of bad men who were once alive. Now they are trying to get into the living. If they succeed, they produce illness. To combat them, the medicine men need help from spirits which are on the side of man in the struggle with evil. Some of these guardian spirits live in certain plants, and that is why the use of vegetable medicine must be accompanied by incantations if it is to work.

The medicine man can also induce guardian spirits to make their abode in sticks and wooden dolls, which he has with him when there are patients to be treated. A Choco doctor has several sticks with spirits in them. They are adorned with carvings, and are given to him by the medicine men who had been his teachers. Every Choco boy owns a carved stick which is the dwelling of his guardian spirit, and he has received this from the medicine man,

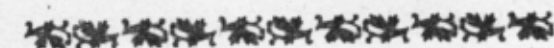
[Courtesy "Children of the jungle" by Per Host]

LEVITATION UNRAVELLED

One D. D. Home who had defrauded a widow of £33,000, and had been, in the previous year (1868) branded in a London court as a fraud and an adventurer was credited with the ability to "levitate".

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tells us that "there are altogether on record some fifty or sixty cases of levitation on the part of Home"; that "Professor Crookes saw Home levitated twice"; and that "as he floated round the room he wrote his name above the pictures." It is a pity that Sir A. C. Doyle does not tell people that Home did all these wonderful things in the dark and that in most cases the people present merely had Home's word for it that he was "floating round the room".

No reliable witness giving us a precise account of the circumstances, has ever claimed that he saw Home off the ground and clear of all furniture. Sir W. Crookes says that he saw Home, in poor light, rise six inches for a space of ten seconds. It is a poor instalment of miracle; but I am obliged to add that Crookes was at the other side of the room, and he confesses that he did not see Home's feet leave the ground!



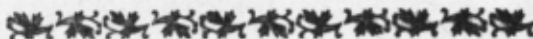
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SPIRITUALISM began in 1848 with the humble and entirely fraudulent phenomena of raps. Within three years there were hundreds of mediums in the United States, and a dollar per sitter was the customary fee for assisting at one of the services of the new religion. It soon became widely known that raps could be produced by very earthly means, and in any case the rivalry of mediums was bound to develop new "phenomena"; As in all other professions, originality paid, and as the wonderful discovery was quickly made that darkness favoured the intensity and variety of the phenomena, the spirit power began to break upon humanity in a bewildering variety of forms.

Courtesy : Is Spiritualism Based
on Fraud? By Joseph McCabe.



Our artist, Mr. A. Ponnuswamy and Ms. Savithri Devi, the newly-Weds.

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We heartily welcome the following New Members.

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Rationalist Booklets for Sale

The following booklets have been recently received from various publishers. For members of Indian Rationalist Association postage by ordinary post is free. Others may kindly add 10% of the value of the books towards Postage, packing and forwarding :

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1 Critique on vedas —Prof. Surendra Ajnat	0	75
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Indian Rationalist Association, 28/18, Pantheon Road, Madras-8 or at their Stall No. 66 in Shopping Arcade at the All India Tourist and Trade Fair being conducted at Madras.